



Understanding Current Threats Facing the Federal Department of Education and What it Means for Students with Disabilities March 2025

What Is Happening Right Now?

The Department of Education is a government agency that oversees federal education policy and administers funding for programs and individuals.

On March 20, 2025, President Trump signed an [Executive Order](#), directing the federal Department of Education to “facilitate the closure of the Department of Education and return authority over education to the States...”

Executive orders are a tool by which a president can enact their policy goals. Even before this Executive Order was issued, President Trump and Education Secretary Linda McMahon had taken steps to dismantle the department, [firing](#) nearly 50% of its workforce.

How Does the Department of Education Support Students with Disabilities?

The federal Department of Education plays a critical role in civil rights enforcement and special education funding, including ensuring that disabled students have access to Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), speech therapy, and more. [Nationwide](#), 15% of all public school students have a disability.

The Department of Education also plays a key role in funding schools across the country. Schools, including those in Massachusetts, rely on federal funding to support students with disabilities, pay for special education teachers and services, and more.

What Relevant Laws Are Threatened?

[The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act](#) (IDEA) was passed in [1975](#) to ensure that students with disabilities are provided with an education that is tailored to their needs. Among other important provisions, IDEA requires that public schools create an IEP for every student who needs it and requires that students with disabilities, as much as possible, are educated alongside their peers in the “least restrictive environment.”

[Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973](#) (Section 504) is a civil rights law that ensures that people with disabilities are not excluded from programs or activities that receive federal funding, including schools. It requires that programs are accessible, and that reasonable accommodations are made. Section 504 does not only cover schools—it includes hospitals, transportation systems, and more. Specific to education, Section 504 requires that schools create 504 plans to provide accommodations and modifications needed for students to learn.

Though the recent Executive Order does not explicitly touch civil rights laws such as the IDEA and Section 504, they will be impacted. Current staff reductions are concentrated in offices including civil rights enforcement, which play a critical role in enforcing these rules and supporting students with disabilities.

What Happens Next?

Importantly, Executive Orders do not supersede laws passed by Congress. Lawsuits can challenge Executive Orders, and several have already been filed as of March 2025. One such lawsuit was **filed** in Massachusetts by Attorney General Andrea Campbell and 19 other states. This will likely be an ongoing and lengthy legal process.

What Can I Do in Massachusetts?

We must voice our concerns to our congressional delegation and ensure that Massachusetts is prepared to support students.

- **Contact your members of congress** and share your story of why special education and non-discrimination policies are important. [Find your federal legislators here.](#)
- **Join us!** Advocacy is more effective when individuals join together. Sign up for [The Arc of Massachusetts's action alerts](#) and [The Arc of the United States' action alerts](#).
- **We are here to help.** We know that these changes are fast-moving and significant. Please reach out to us if you need support in navigating these changes or engaging in advocacy.

For More Information

Please reach out for more detailed information by contacting Nora Bent, Director of Government Affairs and Strategic Partnerships, at nbent@arcmass.org.